

Service Catalog and the Back Office Connection

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With the introduction of the IT Infrastructure Library version 3 (ITIL v3), awareness and adoption of the Service Catalog is rapidly increasing. As a cornerstone of the IT *front office*, it offers IT users access to the services they need while shielding them from the complex technologies and processes of the IT *back office*. While much of the value of the Service Catalog stems from hiding these complexities, additional value can be provided by reducing or eliminating them.

To get the most out of a Service Catalog implementation, leading IT organizations leverage the back office connection by leveraging Service Design's *Service Catalog Management* process.

The Service Catalog has many roles to play and the *Service Catalog Management* process builds direct relationships to processes in every stage of ITIL v3 Service Lifecycle – from Service Strategy and Design to Service Transition and Operation to Continual Service Improvement. For instance, it can link together the Financial Management and Demand Management processes to gain a better understanding of which departments are consuming what services and what cost. It can also integrate Service Level Management (SLM) to ensure committed service levels from the Service Catalog are monitored and maintained. But it is Service Operation's *Request Fulfillment* process that most directly interfaces with the *Service Catalog Management* process to connect the Service Catalog with the back office.

Old School Request Handling

Consider a relatively simple request from a user to the IT organization for access to project management software. Without an integrated *Service Catalog Management* and *Request Fulfillment* solution, there are a number of challenges. Users must first find and learn the appropriate request process, which often varies between request types. Is there a paper submission form, an email request, or a web link to select? Is the user responsible for gaining approval before submitting the request? Does someone in IT need to verify the approval? What happens if items in the request form are missing or incomplete?

Note that this was just the first part of the process – properly submitting an approved request. The rest of the process has additional challenges and many more manual and error-prone steps. Eventually, with an approved form in hand, an IT staff member must fulfill the request. The actions taken will depend on factors like what operating system and patch levels the requesting user has installed on their system as well as availability of the desired software. How should the IT staff member proceed if all of the purchased licenses have been allocated? What if a newer version of the software needs to be ordered?

To make the right decisions, the staff member needs to be trained on the process and the various scenarios that can arise. However, the request is also likely to be passed around between the different members of the IT organization that are responsible for the individual steps in the process. This means delays as well as an increased risk from mistakes. The better alternative is a mature *Service Catalog* process with integrated *Request Fulfillment* capabilities.

Service Catalog Management and Request Fulfillment

By using automated processes through an integrated *Service Catalog Management* and *Request Fulfillment* system, each of these challenges – and others - can be addressed.

Service Catalog Management solutions provide a single web location for making all types of user requests. Rather than hunting for an appropriate form, users can navigate intuitively organized categories from one starting point. Instead of chasing signatures through the management chain, the requesting user simply relies on the integrated solution to ensure approval. First off, only the services for which a given user is eligible to seek approval are listed in the *user-specific Service Catalog* view. Then, the *Request Fulfillment* component may route the request for approval based on rules and organizational structure data gathered from Active Directory or other sources.

Significant time has already been saved at this point in the process, yet only now can the true potential for improving back office execution be realized. Gone is the swivel chair process where an IT staff member looks up data in the asset database and quickly turns from one screen to another to obtain data for current system configuration and ordering instructions. There is no longer a need to hand off the installation process to another staff member to run the installation script or tool.

Instead, a well automated *Request Fulfillment* process, driven directly from the *Service Catalog*, can pull data directly from the asset management system or database and use it to make intelligent decisions on how to proceed. The process can respond appropriately whether existing project management software and licenses are available or not. In fact, leading solutions can interface with suppliers to order and track delivery of products and services.

By utilizing other back office tools to determine a system's existing configuration, install appropriate patches and software versions, set required access levels on shared resources, and automate other steps, most if not all of the *Request Fulfillment* process can be automated. Further, users can be kept up to date with every change in the status of their request throughout the process. User productivity as well as satisfaction is greatly improved.

Summary

The *Service Catalog* will continue as a cornerstone of the front office, with the *Service Catalog Management* process hiding the process and technology complexities of the back office and making service information available to users. Additionally, with integrated *Request Fulfillment*, it will go further to minimize or eliminate the complexities of the back office. These combined solutions have demonstrated their ability to improve user experience and productivity, ensure required management approvals, and provide up to date status information.

They have also demonstrated their power to improve back office execution. Whether through gathering data to make intelligent decisions or automating traditionally manual processes, a tightly coupled *Service Catalog Management* and *Request Fulfillment* solution can improve execution, ensure consistency, increase quality, and lower costs in the IT back office.

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